

Homeland Calling: Kurdish Diaspora and State-building in Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the Post-Saddam Era

Baser, B

Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University's Repository

Original citation & hyperlink:

Baser, B 2017, 'Homeland Calling: Kurdish Diaspora and State-building in Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the Post-Saddam Era' Middle East Critique, vol 27, no. 1, pp. 77-94

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2017.1415512>

DOI 10.1080/19436149.2017.1415512

ISSN 1943-6149

ESSN 1943-6157

Publisher: Taylor and Francis

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Middle East Critique on 27th December 2017, available

online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/19436149.2017.1415512>

Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

This document is the author's post-print version, incorporating any revisions agreed during the peer-review process. Some differences between the published version and this version may remain and you are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.

(In Press–2018) Homeland Calling: Kurdish Diaspora and State-building in Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the Post-Saddam Era, *Middle East Critique*.

Homeland Calling: Kurdish Diaspora and State-building in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the Post-Saddam Era

Bahar Baser- Coventry University / Stellenbosch University

Abstract

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has recognised regional autonomy within Iraq and it is going through institution- and state-building during the last decade. The Kurdish diaspora played a major role in this process by providing vital assistance to homeland's reconstruction and development efforts. This article examines the interactions between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its diaspora by focusing on the diaspora engagement initiatives formulated by the KRG. The arguments are based on extensive fieldwork (2012-2016) in the KRI and in Europe where the author conducted interviews with diaspora members, returnees and policy-makers.

Key words: Iraqi Kurdistan, diaspora, state-building, post-conflict reconstruction

Introduction

The importance of diaspora communities has long been recognized in different fields of social science from sociology to international relations. Scholars¹ have extensively researched how diasporas affect developments in their homelands by sending remittances, investing in the homeland or by lobbying host states and supranational institutions. In a post-

¹See for example: J.M. Brinkerhoff (2008) Exploring the Role of Diasporas in Rebuilding Governance in Post-Conflict Societies. In: *Africa's Finances: The Contribution of Remittances*, pp. 239-262 (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing). A. Gamlen (2006) Diaspora engagement policies: What are they and what kinds of states use them? Working Paper 06-32, (Oxford, UK: COMPAS, University of Oxford).

conflict setting, diaspora contributions become all the more vital as they can contribute to knowledge capital and knowledge transfer, capacity-building and investment as well as peace-building and the strengthening of civil society.² In some cases, diasporas are even perceived as a solution to underdevelopment in war-torn homelands.³ Contemporary states are keenly aware of their diasporas' potential and they therefore develop policies to tap into diaspora resources and engage them in homeland politics, development and public diplomacy in response to the increasing visibility of diasporas in today's world.⁴

The Kurdish diaspora is one of those influential diasporas that has tremendous visibility in transnational space. As a result of labour migration, political turmoil and conflicts in their countries of origin, Kurds have become dispersed throughout Europe and beyond. It is argued that there are more than one million Kurds who live outside their homeland and they mostly reside in European countries such as Germany, France, United Kingdom and Sweden.⁵ Many diaspora Kurds, along with their offspring, keep an attachment to their places of origin, and maintain a sense of nationalism that encourages them to support and contribute to the Kurdish cause from afar.⁶ This article focuses solely on the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora as it constitutes a different case compared to other Kurdish diaspora groups due to its status as an autonomous region within its home nation. Iraqi Kurdistan gained a degree of autonomy immediately after the Gulf War in 1991, and economically blossomed after 2003 following the collapse of

² R. Cheran (2004) Diaspora circulation and transnationalism: Agents for change in the post-conflict zones of Sri Lanka. Policy paper submitted to the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Management, (Berlin, Germany).

³ G. Mohan (2008) Making Neoliberal States of Development: The Ghanian Diaspora and the Politics of Homelands, *Environment and Planning*, 26(3), pp.464-469.

⁴ F. Ragazzi (2014) A Comparative Analysis of Diaspora Policies, *Political Geography*, 41, pp.74-89.

⁵ M. Toivanen (2014) Negotiating Home and Belonging: Young Kurds in Finland, PhD Thesis, (Turku, University of Turku, Finland), pp.78.

⁶ A. H. Akkaya (2008) The Impact of Nation-Building Process in Iraqi Kurdistan on Kurdish Diaspora. Unpublished MA Thesis, Universiteit Gent, Belgium.

Saddam Hussein's regime. Constitutionally it is not an independent state, however 'empirically the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) behaves as if it is a sovereign entity'.⁷ The financial crises and tensions between the Iraqi government and the KRG, as well as the war with the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) since 2014, have recently put the KRG between a rock and a hard place. For a short period after 2003, the region saw visible economic recovery due to oil revenues, along with institution- and state-building. Concurrently, the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora has played and continues to play a major role in the progression towards independence by involving itself in various social, economic and political spheres. The diaspora's exile politicians, academics and entrepreneurs are actively involved in the process, and there has been a growing trend of diaspora members returning to Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) permanently or temporarily with the aim of being a part of this state-building experience.⁸ The KRG has also acknowledged the importance of its diaspora and has been organizing a series of events, seminars and conferences (such as the World Kurdish Congress) to involve them as much as possible and tap into the capacities they have acquired abroad. During the last decade, the KRG has also been formulating institutional avenues for formal engagement with its diaspora. These activities significantly resemble the diaspora engagement policy formulations of a nation state, despite the KRI's lack of constitutional independence.

The article asks the following question: How does the KRG, as a *de facto state* engage with its diaspora? The main argument is that since 2003, KRG-diaspora relations have taken a different turn, and the changing dynamics in the region is affecting the structure of the

⁷ N. Soguk (2015) With/out a State, Kurds Rising: The Un/Stated Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq. *Globalizations*, 12(6), pp. 957.

⁸ A. Emanuelsson (2008) Transnational Dynamics of Return and The Potential Role of the Kurdish Diaspora in Developing the Kurdistan Region', (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, UK).

diaspora's interactions with the homeland actors. The diaspora initially played a significant role in terms of creating advocacy networks and spreading awareness about the Kurdish cause in Iraq, however during the last decade its role has shifted towards a more subordinate position. The emergence of KRG Representations in European countries and elsewhere (particularly in the United States) as well as the rise of the KRG as a state-like actor determine a new path for the diaspora and enable it to act similarly to a state-linked diaspora, rather than a stateless one. In fact, often the KRG Representations in these countries are chosen from the diaspora, which facilitates bridging the gap between the KRI and the host states and at the same time creates avenues for sustained paradiplomacy efforts. The diaspora still has agency, but the political dimension of the diasporic agenda is gradually shifting towards a new role that complements the homeland's expectations, specifically in the economic realm.

The arguments are based on fieldwork in the KRI, Germany, Sweden, France and the Netherlands between 2012 and 2014, where I interviewed diaspora members, entrepreneurs, Kurdish policy-makers and returning migrants from the first and second generations of the diaspora. Due to the change in the situation in the KRI – as a result of the financial crisis, the war with the Islamic State, and tensions between the central government and the KRG – I decided to review my conclusions and conducted follow-up interviews in 2016, as well as new ones with the KRG Representation in London and prominent diaspora entrepreneurs.

Diaspora-Homeland Interactions in Post-Conflict Settings

Home states engage diasporas in capacity-building activities by making them part of *symbolic nation-building* projects in the transnational field and engaging them in *institution-building* back in the homeland. Home states may reinforce claims of a shared national identity with the

diasporas and remind them of their duties and loyalties towards the country of origin.⁹ The reasons behind these initiatives vary. Homeland political actors may have an interest in maintaining strong ties with expatriates, and therefore may modify policies in order to comply with the hostland's conditions. They may also aim to attract remittances and foreign investment, and in order to achieve that goal they may pursue a highly determined policy to strengthen diaspora-homeland ties. Homeland political actors may encourage diaspora representatives to lobby host governments in the homeland's favour, and form strategic alliances with businessmen as well as politicians in the host country.¹⁰ Furthermore, certain elites in the home country may engage in mobilizing different sub-groups in the diaspora community in order to expand their interests and ideologies abroad.

According to Gamlen¹¹ one of the main strategies that home states use to engage diasporas with homeland projects is to organize large conferences and conventions which bring homeland actors and diasporans together. They aim to establish patronage relationships with diasporans who perceive themselves as part of larger constituencies, and keep the relationship between the home and the diaspora strong and intact. Gamlen gives the examples of Armenia, Cyprus, India, Nigeria, Eritrea, South Africa and Senegal, which are among the countries that have built strong institutional relationships with their diaspora communities in order to promote alternative development methods. In other words, they treat their diasporas as a 'knowledge base for development and reconstruction projects.' Ghana's 'Homecoming Summit in 2001', for instance, is an illustration of how home states want to attract diaspora investments and harness their resources for national development.¹² Likewise, Ivory Coast and

⁹ Gamlen, *Diaspora Engagement Policies*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 18.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 7.

¹² Mohan, *Making Neoliberal States of Development*, pp.468.

South Africa are among the many countries that conducted bureaucratic activities to allow diasporas to be even more involved.¹³

Financial assistance in the form of remittances and investment provides an incentive for home states to engage with diasporas, especially when it comes to post-conflict reconstruction. Remittances, investments, knowledge transfers and the political influence of diasporas can, if utilized effectively, make an enormous difference in development and recovery processes in the homeland.¹⁴ Remittances can be individual or collective depending on their purpose and form. Individual remittances aim to help the diasporans' families with subsistence needs, health care, education and housing, while collective remittances are gathered from the diaspora members for particular purposes such as helping a political movement.¹⁵ China, New Zealand, India and Ireland are among the countries which developed a diaspora policy in order to attract foreign direct investment.¹⁶

Brinkerhoff¹⁷ conducted extensive research on whether diasporas can help rebuild governance capacity in post-conflict countries, and found that diasporas are indeed fruitful sources of human capital in a post-conflict setting, and that international organizations are increasingly seeking help from diaspora organizations for their development projects. Diaspora entrepreneurs and their investments in the homeland are also perceived as a crucial part of post-conflict development projects. They may expand their business to the homeland by

¹³ Cheran, *Diaspora circulation and transnationalism*, pp. 8.

¹⁴ A. Gamlen (2008) *Why engage diasporas?* Working Paper 08-63. (Oxford, UK: COMPAS, University of Oxford).

¹⁵ A.A. Mohamoud (2006) *African Diaspora and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Africa*, (DIIS Brief, Denmark), pp. 6.

¹⁶ A. Gamlen, *Why engage diasporas?*

¹⁷ Brinkerhoff, *Exploring the Role of Diasporas*, pp. 241.

bringing capital, technology and market knowledge.¹⁸ But how can home states enable diaspora investment? Nielsen & Riddle¹⁹ argue that post-conflict governments can attract diaspora investment firstly by facilitating diaspora investment in the country of origin and secondly by cultivating a sense of connection between the diaspora and the homeland. Home states are aware of this potential, so they organize image-building campaigns, arrange special legal status for diaspora members, grant external voting rights, incorporate diaspora organizations into advocacy and reconciliation processes, mobilize the younger generations of the diaspora abroad and create new opportunities of employment and engagement.

As Mohamoud²⁰ suggests: '[...] during the post-conflict reconstruction period, the diaspora, due to their generally advanced educational levels, can assist the new governments in drafting treaties, agreements and constitutions, identifying policy priorities for social economic and political reconstruction, and formulating strategies for implementation'. In terms of knowledge capital and knowledge transfer, diasporans can take part in institution-building by assuming roles as the founding members of universities²¹, or they can take roles in political parties and parliaments and use the expertise they gained abroad for the benefit of their home countries.²² According to Mohamoud, diasporas can also play the role of advisor on several issues in terms of institution-building and normalizing the political situation during the post-conflict period. He gives the example of the Eritrean diaspora, which helped to draft the first constitution after the country separated from Ethiopia in 1993. In exchange, the Eritrean

¹⁸ K.Sharma, A. Kashyap, F. M.Montes, P. Ladd (2011) *Realizing the Development Potential of Diasporas*, (United Nations University Press, New York).

¹⁹ T.M. Nielsen & L. Riddle (2009) Investing in Peace: The Motivational Dynamics of Diaspora Investment in Post-Conflict Economies.' *Journal of Business Ethics* 89 (4), pp. 435 – 448.

²⁰ Mohamoud, *African Diaspora and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Africa*, pp. 7.

²¹ Cheran, *Diaspora circulation and transnationalism*, pp. 14.

²² Brinkerhoff, *Exploring the Role of Diasporas*, pp. 242.

diaspora was given external-voting rights, a process that connected the diaspora back to the homeland.

Diasporas may also contribute through civic-oriented projects and the encouragement of civil society, development and business engagements.²³ These projects are usually local or sub-national in nature and follow a bottom-up approach but they play a complementary role as part of a holistic development project. Civil society construction in a local context, livelihood development and business investments can all be part of a diaspora's contribution to a broader peacebuilding project.²⁴ In particular, hometown associations in host countries typically become active during this phase, and raise funds for projects that target micro-level development in specific localities.

In some cases diasporans and homeland political actors might not agree on a shared vision about the projects that should be pursued. Although there is an overlap with future aims and targeted development strategies, there might still be divergent approaches to achieving specific goals.²⁵ Their diverging approaches to certain issues may grow apart over time, and this can create clashes at times. Some diasporas are so powerful that they are able shape policy, but others can only have an influence in shaping rhetoric.²⁶ The institutional framework set up by the homeland governments usually determines the scope of diaspora's contributions and in most cases expectations are mostly in the economic realm, so much so that diasporas' political

²³ See also A.C. Budabin (2014). Diasporas as development partners for peace? The alliance between the Darfuri diaspora and the Save Darfur Coalition, *Third World Quarterly*, 35(1), pp. 163-180.

²⁴ Mohamoud African Diaspora and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Africa, pp. 9.

²⁵ T. Manaseryan (2014) Diaspora – the comparative advantage for Armenia. Armenian International Policy Research Group, Working Paper No 4/14, (Armenia).

²⁶ D. Derderian (2010) Democracy in Armenia and Diaspora-Armenia relations' Paper presented to the Second Annual PFA Forum on Armenia-Diaspora Relations, February 28 – March 2, (Washington D.C, USA).

inclusion is increasingly limited, while economic inclusion is enhanced by specifically tailored policies.²⁷

The ethnic ties, however, do not necessarily engender cooperation between the diasporans, returnees and locals. In some cases, locals are sceptical of diaspora returnees who left a long time ago and have lived lives at a distance from the consequences of the conflict back home. In other cases, diasporans can feel alienated from local cultural and social norms, and can find it hard to adapt to the current situation.²⁸ There is not always a consensus or an overlap between the expectations of the home state and the diaspora. It is quite possible that in some cases diaspora interventions are not welcomed, or their efforts may be taken with a 'pinch of salt' by homeland actors.²⁹ As Sanchez-Villa³⁰ reports, returnees often face difficulties in materializing their projects because they feel ill at ease with local administrative culture and bureaucracy. Moreover, because diasporans who return usually come from more developed states, their imagination and ideas can be marginalized in the homeland. This can also make diaspora-local cooperation on post-conflict reconstruction projects at economic, social and political level more difficult. The heart of the matter is to be able to formulate effective policies to turn these tensions into beneficial cooperation without disturbing the delicate balance of diaspora-local interactions.

Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)

²⁷ Mohan, *Making Neoliberal States of Development*, pp.470.

²⁸ M. Van Houte & T. Davids (2008) Development and Return Migration: from policy panacea to migrant perspective sustainability, *Third World Quarterly*, 29 (7), pp. 1411-1429.

²⁹ Brinkerhoff, *Exploring the Role of Diasporas*, pp. 244.

³⁰ S. Sanchez Villa (2011) In-or Outsiders? The Return of Qualified Diaspora Members and Their Role in Rebuilding Post-Conflict Governance, *The BSIS Journal of International Studies*, 8, pp. 9.

Saddam Hussein's brutal policy towards the Kurds, which included genocidal attempts and massacres, fostered Kurdish nationalism even more in the 1970s and 1980s. During the *Al-Anfal* campaign carried out by government forces in the late 1980s, over one hundred thousand Kurds were killed and it was thus labeled as genocide by Human Rights Watch in a report published in 1995.³¹ In 1991, a popular uprising began in the Shi'a South and Kurdish North which resulted in 20,000 deaths which also caused further displacement of the Kurds. Many Kurds had to flee their homes and had to find shelter in Iran or Turkey. At the end of the Gulf War, the coalition forces created a safe haven in the north of Iraq.³² The KRG was then founded in 1992 with the first democratically elected parliament in Kurdistan after the establishment of the no-fly-zone that protected them from further violence. Under pressure from the United States, the Iraqi Government withdrew its political and military presence from Iraqi Kurdistan. This in the end, as Toivanen argues, enabled the flourishing of a more localized and territorial Kurdish identity separate from Baghdad and Kurdish nationalism has gained momentum.³³

The predominant political parties, KDP and PUK stayed in power and continued to dictate the politics of the region.³⁴ After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Iraqi Kurdish region gained recognition from international actors and it experienced economic growth as well as political stability when compared with the other parts of Iraq.³⁵ This situation brought significant international investment to the region as it was considered a safe place compared to the rest

³¹D. King (2005) *Asylum Seekers / Patron Seekers: Interpreting Iraqi Kurdish Migration*, *Human Organization*, 64(4), pp. 317.

³² Toivanen, *Negotiating Home and Belonging*, pp.71.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. Also see: M. Irwani (2015) *Clientelism and Implementing Social Security Programmes on Post-Conflict Iraqi Kurdistan Region*, (Newcastle Upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing).

³⁵ A. Strand, S. Bendixsen, E. Paasche and J. Schultz (2011) *Between Two Societies: Review of the Information, Return and Reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq programme*, CMI Report.

of the country. Okechukwu Unegbu and Okanlawon found that foreign direct investment in Kurdistan Region was much higher compared to the investment figures in Iraq as a whole. They also found that the investments increased immensely from 2005 to 2013 and each Governorate in the Kurdistan Region benefited from the capital inflows. In their words: “The quasi-autonomous status empowered on the region legally and politically has spread to attracting massive direct foreign investment. Within the last ten years, more than 40b dollar Direct Foreign Investment (DFI) came to the region.”³⁶ In the meantime, ‘the Kurdish society has transformed extremely rapidly from a largely agrarian-based, highly regulated, and state owned economy to a market economy’.³⁷ The 2005 constitution paved the way for guaranteed federalism and a kind of ‘semi-independence’ for Iraqi Kurdistan, built on fragile promises from the Baghdad government.³⁸ As Soguk³⁹ puts it: ‘Kurdistan is not an independent state in the formal legal sense in the international system of states. Informally, however, it exceeds the state of Iraq practically and paradigmatically. It is part of Iraq but also apart from Iraq.’

Until recently, economic success in the KRI was boosted to a great extent by its rich oil reserves. The KDP has been planning a referendum on independence, writing a new constitution, and building the institutions of an independent state. However, KRI’s stalled economy due to current crises, lack of access to international markets for its oil, nepotism, corruption and governance challenges are the biggest problems to be faced before acting on it. Up until a few years ago, this situation of stability and the financial boom attracted many

³⁶ A. Okechukwu Unegbu & A. Okanlawon (2015) Direct Foreign Investment in Kurdistan Region of Middle-East: Non-oil Sector Analysis, *British Journal of Economics, Management and Trade*, 6(1), pp.38-40.

³⁷ P. Hautaniemi, M. Juntunen, and M. Sato (2013) Return Migration and Vulnerability: Case studies from Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan, Department of Political and Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, (University of Helsinki, Finland), pp. 81.

³⁸ M. Gunter (2013) The Contemporary Roots of Kurdish Nationalism in Iraq, *Kufa Review*, 2(1), pp.39.

³⁹ Soguk, *With/out a State, Kurds Rising*, pp. 958.

Kurds to return to their homeland from abroad⁴⁰ and subsequently they took up important political posts in the government as well as universities among other important roles.⁴¹ For instance, almost half of the first KRG parliament elected after 2003 had residence permits or citizenships in another country, either in Europe or elsewhere.⁴² Diaspora members, including returnees, have occupied an important place in Kurdish society, and their role appears to have shifted from advocacy to active state-building during the last decade. Being educated in Western countries, diasporans have been able to offer many opportunities to their war-torn homeland, including know-how, social and political capital as well as direct investments. However, whether this mobility will remain constant in the midst of political and economic crisis in KRI is an issue that has not been adequately dealt with so far.

Iraqi Kurdish Grassroots Mobilization in Europe

Kurdish organizations claim that there are over a million Kurds living in Europe.⁴³ No comprehensive data has been gathered about how many Iraqi Kurds live in diaspora and how many have actually returned to their homeland since 2003.⁴⁴ The first wave of migration for Iraqi Kurds consisted in large part of highly-educated middle-class men who were politically active in their homeland. They had received a high level of education and typically came from wealthy families. There were a small number of Kurdish intellectuals who migrated for

⁴⁰ There are no reliable statistics related to how many Kurds returned to Kurdistan within the last ten years. Most of the diasporans have dual citizenship and the KRG does not hold statistics of how many returned permanently and how many others are in circular migration.

⁴¹ Y. Voller (2012) *From rebellion to de facto statehood: international and transnational sources of the transformation of the Kurdish national liberation movement in Iraq into the Kurdistan regional government*. PhD thesis, (The London School of Economics and Political Science).

⁴² Interview with Dr. Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff to the Presidency of the Kurdistan Regional Government, April 2013.

⁴³ Interview with the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) Representative of the Netherlands, Amsterdam, November 2013.

⁴⁴ Interviews with Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations, April 2013 and interview with Karwan Jamal Tahir, KRG Representative in London, December 2015.

educational reasons prior to the 1970s, but the majority of Kurds who make up the diaspora today fled from repression in their respective countries of origin. A significant wave of migration occurred in the 1970s when many Iraqi Kurds fled from Iraqi State's destruction of thousands of Kurdish villages.⁴⁵ Another mass-exodus of Kurds resulted from the defeat of the Kurdish parties by the Iraqi Government in the aftermath of the Kurdish Rebellion in 1991, and also during the period of political turmoil following the First Gulf War.⁴⁶ The *Al-Anfal* campaigns between 1987 and 1988 played an especially important role in driving up migration from the region. Poisonous gas was used in attacks against civilians; survivors were deported and their villages completely destroyed.⁴⁷ People who managed to escape these atrocities often became asylum-seekers in neighbouring countries or in Europe.

Thus, Kurdish transnational political activities gained significance and played political, economic and social roles to contribute to the homeland's cause. The Iraqi Kurdish diaspora became one of the most active diasporas in Europe and the USA, and had to take the form of a stateless diaspora: there was no legitimate diplomatic entity to support Kurds who were being massacred in Iraq, no official representation by which to make their voices heard, and no state to willingly provide passports and other official papers which could allow them to exist as citizens.⁴⁸ For this reason, the Kurdish diaspora resorted to the typical channels of a stateless diaspora: grassroots activism, mass mobilization, advocacy networks and alliances with civil society and political actors in host countries. The idea of return was postponed, and instead many more Kurds joined their families in Europe and elsewhere.⁴⁹ Thus, the political

⁴⁵ Toivanen, *Negotiating Home and Belonging*, pp.79.

⁴⁶ Strand, Bendixsen, Paasche & Schultz, *Between Two Societies*, pp. 25.

⁴⁷ M. Van Bruinessen (2000) *Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question*. Working paper, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, (European University Institute, Florence).

⁴⁸ Interview with the KDP Representative of the Netherlands.

⁴⁹ Emanuelsson, *Transnational Dynamics of Return*, pp. 7.

centre of gravity of the Kurdish resistance in Iraq was carried to the diaspora.⁵⁰ At the same time, many diaspora members from all over Europe sent money back to their relatives⁵¹, although the standard of living in the diaspora tended to be quite low.⁵² However, despite the importance of these individual remittances, the diaspora's influence was most significantly felt in the political realm.

Germany, the Netherlands and the UK were some of the key European countries in which Iraqi Kurds began to mobilize politically. Van Bruinessen⁵³ explains that the first Kurdish diaspora organization in Europe (KSSE) was established in Wiesbaden (West Germany) in 1956 by some students. After 1975, it was split into different factions due to intra-Kurdish rivalries.⁵⁴ The Kurdish diaspora became divided along political party lines within transnational space, and the relationship between the domestic Kurdish parties was reflected in the exile communities of the diaspora, despite their extremely limited access to their homeland.⁵⁵ The first wave of migrants maintained minimal contact with their homeland due to the risk of persecution, since any contact with relatives might cause them to suffer further in the hands of the regime.⁵⁶

Kurdish activism in the UK had a visible presence during those turbulent times. From the 1970s onwards, Kurds in the UK used various repertoires of protest and activism. For instance, the Iraqi Embassy building in London was peacefully invaded in 1991, in protest of the genocidal campaigns of the Hussein regime against Kurds in Iraq. Some activists were arrested in the aftermath of these events, but it was clear that they had at least managed to

⁵⁰ Voller, *From rebellion to de facto statehood*, pp. 128.

⁵¹ Emanuelsson, *Transnational Dynamics of Return*, pp. 5.

⁵² Interview with Dr. Fuad Hussein.

⁵³ Van Bruinessen, *Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question*.

⁵⁴ A. Emanuelsson (2005) *Diaspora Global Politics*, PhD Thesis, (Goteborg University, Sweden) pp.86.

⁵⁵ Interview with Gorran Representatives in Berlin, May 2013.

⁵⁶ Emanuelsson, *Transnational Dynamics of Return*, pp. 6.

draw attention to the situation back in their homeland. A hunger strike was also carried out by Kurdish activists outside the American Embassy. As a result, many British politicians voiced support for Kurdish demands, and petitioned Iraqi officials to bring an end to the offensive against the Kurds. These efforts helped to make the Kurdish cause visible through popular media outlets such as the BBC.⁵⁷ Among my interviewees was Ali Mahmoud Muhammad, a Kurdish rights activist who founded the first organization to advocate for genocide recognition (Al-Anfal) in the Netherlands and has been its president for seven years. The organization – called CHAK (the *Center of Halabja against Anfalization and Genocide of Kurdish people*) – has been politically active in several Dutch cities in its efforts to draw attention to the plight of Kurds.⁵⁸ In an interview with the president of the Kurdish Institute in Paris, Kendal Nezan, it was revealed that the Kurdish diaspora in France also mobilized in support of the Kurdish cause, and tried to persuade French politicians and human rights activists to show an interest in the plight of Kurds in the Middle East. According to Nezan's testimony, Danielle Mitterrand, the wife of the former French President, showed great interest in Kurdish issues, and thanks to her support, many Kurds from Iraq were granted asylum in France. The Kurdish diaspora played an important role, especially prior to the fall of Saddam Hussein, because Kurds in Iraq were heavily suppressed and the diaspora was able to take on the role of a loud-speaker on behalf of this population and allow their voices to be heard by policy-makers the world over.

The interviews revealed that the diaspora prioritized political contributions until 2003. However, the representatives of Kurdish diaspora organizations in Europe emphasized that the diaspora is increasingly adapting, at the behest of the KRG, to a new role which revolves

⁵⁷ Interview with Karwan Jamal Tahir.

⁵⁸ CHAK was founded in June 2002, and now operates under the name 'Kurdocide Watch', at the website: www.kurdocide.org.

more around economic contributions, development, transitional justice and the promotion of the KRI in international platforms. There are certainly diaspora organizations which remain autonomous and follow a different agenda than that which is set by the KRG, but still, the KRG's ascendancy since 2003 has fundamentally transformed diaspora-homeland interactions, which currently seem in transition towards a much more institutionalized form of engagement.

Contemporary Diaspora-Homeland Interactions

The KRG's Emergent Diaspora Engagement Policy

Regarding developments in Iraqi Kurdistan during the last decade, one can see that domestic politicians are keenly aware of the diaspora's potential, both abroad and in the homeland. The KRG is attempting to develop policies which can better engage the Kurdish diaspora in homeland affairs, and is also trying to contrive attractive projects and prospects which may appeal to the somewhat counter-diasporic movement of the expatriate Kurdish educational elite. In analysing this process of transition, the parameters set by Gamlen⁵⁹ were discerned: the KRG has increasingly been acting in the manner of a home state, and making the diaspora part of a practice of *symbolic nation-building and institution-building*. The research also seemed to confirm Cheran's⁶⁰ observations about diaspora involvement in post-conflict settings, especially regarding knowledge capital and knowledge transfer, capacity-building and investment, as well as the enhancement of civil society initiatives.

The politicians I interviewed, such as Falah Mustapha Bakir (Head of the Department of Foreign Relations), Hemin Hawrami (Head of Foreign Relations of the Kurdistan Democratic Party) and Dr. Fuad Hussein (Chief of Staff to the Presidency of the Kurdistan Regional

⁵⁹ Gamlen, *Diaspora Engagement Policies*.

⁶⁰ Cheran, *Diaspora circulation and transnationalism*.

Government)⁶¹, all agreed that the diaspora played an extremely important role prior to 2003. They acknowledge the impact of diaspora advocacy activities on raising international awareness about the Iraqi regime's brutality towards the Kurds. According to Hawrami, the diaspora's lobbying activities actually paved the way for *Operation Provide Comfort*⁶² and the emergence of the no-fly-zones.⁶³ However, Hussein for instance, as a former diaspora member himself, also claimed that since the KRG has become stronger in the region, the centre of gravity has shifted back to the homeland, and the diaspora should refresh its outlook accordingly.⁶⁴

A sudden shift in the KRG's expectations about its diaspora became evident, specifically from political to economic engagement. The KRG certainly maintained a set of expectations and policy orientation regarding the lobbying of host-country governments in favour of the KRG, but the priorities were reshuffled. Since 2003, the government has pursued a twofold strategy: attracting diaspora members by direct invitation (on the basis of their expertise), and facilitating paths of return for highly-skilled diasporans who independently wish to resettle in their homeland. KRG's new diaspora strategy is predicated heavily on the idea of attracting diaspora entrepreneurs and highly-skilled members of the community. By initiating a "homeland calling", the official website of the KRG Foreign Ministry offers the following advice: 'The KRG has always welcomed the return of Iraqi Kurds living abroad by their own

⁶¹ These politicians are members of the KDP. Although I acknowledge that there is a certain bias in their testimonies, my insights on the emerging diaspora policy relies on their testimonies more than others as they are the policy makers in this specific context. For the research in general, I interviewed people from all dominant political parties in order to have a more balanced idea.

⁶² Military operations initiated by the American-led coalition of the Gulf War in order to defend Kurds and deliver humanitarian aid in 1991.

⁶³ Surely, it is hard to comprehend the extent of diaspora influence on the policies of the coalition forces but many agree that diasporans kept the plight of the Kurds visible and on the agenda of especially USA and the UK during that time.

⁶⁴ Interview with Dr. Fuad Hussein.

free will; those who are ready and willing to return are encouraged to come and be a part of the rebuilding process of their country.’⁶⁵ Political figures in exile returned and took up positions in parliament (from Chief of Staff in the Parliament to the Education Ministry), or as advisors to high-profile politicians. In response to the KRG’s new strategy, many academics returned to take up positions in universities and established think-tanks⁶⁶ which deliver policy recommendations for the government. During the time of the interviews, the KRG was also planning to implement a new sub-branch of the Foreign Ministry, which will solely be responsible for diaspora affairs.⁶⁷ Taking countries such as Armenia, India, Israel and Turkey as role models, the KRG wishes to invest in a separate institutional branch that would be responsible for monitoring, strengthening and engaging with the diaspora in order to better connect them to homeland development and political projects.⁶⁸

According to Hawrami, the diaspora still has a major role to play, but it will be one which is complementary to the existing policies of the government. In addition to the contributions in economic realm, he listed a few political and social areas in which the KRG perceives the diaspora to be of the utmost importance: a) helping to pursue the recognition by EU Member states and the European Parliament of the *Al-Anfal* Campaign and Halabja Chemical Attacks as instances of genocide, b) lobbying host states to the benefit of Kurdish interests, c) acting as representatives of Kurdish culture abroad and rehabilitating the Kurdish image, and d) engaging with activities that are set by the KRG as part of a long-term and strategic vision.⁶⁹

Interviews with other political figures also seemed to suggest that the diaspora’s political voice in the Kurdish political matters will be limited unless it remains in line with the official

⁶⁵ See: KRG Policies, [<http://dfr.gov.krd/p/p.aspx?p=29&l=12&s=010000&r=336>].

⁶⁶ See for example the Middle East Research Institute, founded by Prof. Dlawer Ala’Aldeen, a returnee from the UK.

⁶⁷ Interview with Falah Mustafa Bakir.

⁶⁸ This is still on the agenda however it has not been materialised yet. Interview with Karwan Jamal Tahir.

⁶⁹ Interview with Hemin Hawrami, Head of the KDP’s Foreign Relations Office, April 2013.

policies of the government. Current understanding of diaspora engagement explanations also assume that all diaspora members hold a shared vision about KRI's future and how things should be done to reach this aim which surely undermines the heterogeneity of the diaspora members.

Similar to what Gamlen⁷⁰ has suggested, the KRG has organized several worldwide conferences under the name of the World Kurdish Congress, in Erbil as well as in European cities such as Stockholm and Rotterdam, where they brought diaspora members from all over the world – from Korea to New Zealand, from Canada to Germany – in order to create a platform for debate on the urgent issues of development and post-conflict reconstruction in the KRI. The idea was to incorporate the diaspora into the nation- and state-building processes. The panels included topics ranging from treatment for the victims of chemical attacks in Halabja, to the construction of industrial dairies in the region. Diaspora members discussed their projects with representatives of the KRG. Diasporans from all political backgrounds were present and the cleavages between different political parties were not visibly present during the Congress.⁷¹

The Foreign Minister, Falah Mustapha Bakir, had the following to say about the World Kurdish Congress in Erbil (6 October 2012):

This is another important initiative and platform by our government to attract the expertise and experience of Kurds and of our friends from the international community to help strengthen and enhance the success of our region [...] We hope that the

⁷⁰ Gamlen, *Diaspora Engagement Policies*.

⁷¹ The conference was suspended in 2014.

delegates as well as the Kurds in the diaspora will think seriously about sharing their experience and expertise with the people living here.⁷²

During his speech to the Congress, he warned diaspora members that ‘they should not expect a red carpet.’ The reason for this statement was that, in his view, diaspora elites sometimes have unreasonably high expectations about their return, and are therefore sometimes disappointed.⁷³ He returned to this theme during a press release:

[...] it is important to realize that they will face many challenges here and they should be prepared for these. Many of these challenges are outside the government's control, but we are doing all that we can to encourage Kurds to return home and contribute in both the private and public sectors.⁷⁴

Bakir’s speech indicates that the KRG perceives the diaspora as an asset. However, the gap between the expectations of the diasporans/returnees and the reality of what the KRG is in fact able to offer may still cause tensions. For this reason, state officials constantly underscore that diasporans and returnees are welcome to contribute to the rebuilding of the country, but they must maintain realistic expectations about what the government can offer them. The fact sheet published on the official website of the government also underlines the following: “The Kurdish Diaspora is part of our family. If there have been any shortcomings in our dealing with them and listening to their issues in the past, we hope that from now on we will live up to their expectations.” And then it follows: “However, they too should strive to live up to the expectations of their country and use their experiences and skills to benefit

⁷² Author’s participant observation at the World Kurdish Congress, October 2012.

⁷³ Interview with Falah Mustafa Bakir.

⁷⁴ See “Kurdish Diaspora is an Important Asset for Our Future”, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/print.aspx?l=12&smap=010000&a=45562>

Kurdistan; because today, they can be of huge benefit to the Kurdistan Region.”⁷⁵ The stronger the KRG has become, the more confident it appears to have felt in defining the terms of its homeland-diaspora engagement.

KRG also invests in attracting the attention of second-generation diaspora Kurds as they can be an asset for new development projects, especially since they are highly educated, capable of speaking several languages and have already built networks abroad. Politicians even suggest that the returnees could be paid higher comparative salaries than locals if necessary.⁷⁶ In turn, the KRG has also published a webpage on the official KRG website which favourably presents the testimonies of young Kurdish diaspora returnees, and reports on their experience in the KRI.⁷⁷ It includes Q&A modules about job opportunities in the KRI, information about how to prepare a CV and apply for jobs, and advice about working in the private sector. The website encourages young people to apply for private sector jobs in the Kurdistan Region, and explains the rationale for this by clearly stating the KRG’s development priorities. The KRG Representative to London, Karwan Jamal Tahir, indicated that they specifically encourage returnees to work in the private sector because the public sector is already fully saturated, a situation which is not helped by the current financial crises in the region.⁷⁸ The private sector is also seen as a potential mechanism for boosting the KRI’s economic development, which is expected to pave the way for a smoother transition to an independent state. As in the cases of Armenia and Israel⁷⁹, a transition towards a market economy is perceived as a success by homeland political actors.

⁷⁵ See “About the Kurdistan Regional Government”, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/p/p.aspx?l=12&p=180>

⁷⁶ Interview with Dr. Fuad Hussein.

⁷⁷ See: Kurdish Diaspora, [<http://kw.krg.org/en/diaspora>]

⁷⁸ Interview with Karwan Jamal Tahir.

⁷⁹ Manaseryan, Diaspora – the comparative advantage for Armenia.

As Nielsen and Riddle⁸⁰ facilitation is a key factor in attracting diaspora investments. Despite consistently inviting the diaspora to consider investing in the country, the KRG does not have an investment policy that is specifically tailored for diaspora entrepreneurs. It was revealed in the interviews with the Board of Investment and Chamber of Commerce that foreign direct investment and other types of investments by national businessmen are currently treated equally. Diasporans are not given particularly special treatment compared with other non-Kurdish businessmen; similar conditions of investment are applied across the board, in accordance with the Investment Law in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.⁸¹ This might deter some diaspora entrepreneurs to consider the idea of permanent or temporary return.

Diaspora Activism After 2003: Paradiplomacy, Public Diplomacy and Lobbying for Recognition

During the last decade, the KRG has formed Representations all over the world which are now acting as unofficial embassies for the KRI and are increasingly seeking to relieve the burden of representation and lobbying activities from the shoulders of diaspora organizations. The Iraqi Kurdish diaspora has in turn begun to behave more like a state-linked diaspora since the KRG Representation⁸² offices became the main actors of Kurdish lobbying in the host countries. These offices represent the KRI's interests abroad while at the same time conducting public diplomacy and paradiplomacy activities with their highly talented and well-educated personnel (who are mostly chosen from the diaspora members). In exchange, diaspora members have started to collaborate with these offices by helping them to better access host-society networks. The offices help the diasporans to communicate with homeland

⁸⁰ Nielsen & Riddle, Investing in Peace.

⁸¹ Interview with the Kurdistan Region Board of Investment and the Chamber of Commerce, Erbil, April, 2013.

⁸² The KRG currently has 14 offices around the world, including an official Representation to the European Union.

actors or they create channels for homeland actors to tap the economic and social capital of the diaspora. Moreover, these institutions created a venue for Kurds to be officially represented and decreased their feeling of statelessness. According to a returnee from the UK, KRG representations are extremely important for mobilizing Kurds in Europe and helping them make their voice heard through more 'legitimate platforms':

KRG representation makes life much easier for the Kurds in the diaspora. They have a platform, they have a vehicle to voice their concern [...] they express themselves on a political level. Finally they found institutional mechanisms that allow you to do that [...].

The KRG also taps the social capital of the diaspora. The government approaches diaspora organizations and key individuals as consultants on certain issues pertaining to democratization and development in the KRI. For instance in 2008, the Prime Minister of the KRG, Nachirvan Barzani, initiated a project in the UK under the auspices of the KRG, in order to deal with the phenomenon of honour-based violence in the KRI as well as in the diaspora. Since the KRG authorities had declared their commitment to the democratization process in the KRI, they were eager to incorporate issues surrounding gender inequality and gender-based violence into their social and public policy agenda. Dr. Nazan Begikhani initiated a research project on that topic along with other academics from Roehampton University and the University of Bristol, and with the support of Kurdish Women's Rights Watch. Kurdish women's organizations from Sweden have also been getting involved in such activities. One of my interviewees from Sweden, the president of the Kurdish Women's Association in Stockholm, Seyran Duran, stated that the KRG has approached her organization in order to develop projects related to gender issues and to enhance civil society

initiatives.⁸³ Duran travelled to the KRI a few times with other members of the diaspora organization, and gave courses in schools in several cities, educating local Kurds about human rights issues and democracy in Sweden. According to Duran, the government is very open towards collaboration with the diaspora. However, many interviewees in the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden, as well as returnees in Erbil, observed that even in social projects of this nature, there is a risk that nepotism will predominate. One interviewee from Rotterdam reported that she had developed many projects and presented them to numerous politicians in the KRI, but due to her lack of access to the right networks, she had never been successful in taking them further. Even for diaspora entrepreneurs, having friends who hold key positions in the government is often decisive regardless of the quality of their proposed project. Some other interviewees argued that diasporans can only share rhetoric but they cannot shape policy unless they belong to certain elite circles in the KRI, which is a situation that has been mentioned by Derderian⁸⁴ for Armenian state-diaspora relations.

Another mechanism for the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora to make their voice heard is participation in Iraqi elections. For instance, the famous Kurdistan Referendum Movement (KRM) was conceived in 2005 within the diaspora, and ‘the Kurdish diaspora has been crucial in developing the movement’s aims, establishing grassroots organizations both inside and outside Iraq, and supporting the movement’s activities on the ground in Iraqi Kurdistan’.⁸⁵ Hawrami also mentioned that Kurds in the diaspora tended to vote for the Kurdish Alliance in the elections of 2009, creating a great shift of political balance in favour of Kurds in the Iraqi government. The diaspora Kurds are aware of their influence, and diaspora organizations oversee a number of campaigns which seek to convince diasporans to go and cast their vote. They are still unable to vote in the KRI’s regional elections, which would more likely have

⁸³ Interview with Seyran Duran, Stockholm, November 2012.

⁸⁴ Derderian, Democracy in Armenia and Diaspora-Armenia relations.

⁸⁵ A. Berwari & T. Ambrosio (2008) The Kurdistan Referendum Movement: Political Opportunity Structures and National Identity, *Democratization*, 15(5), pp.891-908.

the potential to change the balance of power within the KRI itself. The lack of external voting rights in the KRI's government elections may in fact be a blessing in disguise for the diaspora organizations, as it may have a cooling effect on internecine political rivalries within the diaspora. However, the dividing lines of domestic political rivalries already reveal themselves in the diaspora to a certain extent.⁸⁶ The KDP, the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and Gorran (Movement for Change), three of the most powerful parties in the region, organize separately within the diaspora, and they pursue markedly different agendas.⁸⁷ The policies of each party offer distinct strategies when it comes to how best to proceed, post-2003. Some parties are critical of the KDP's alliance with Turkey, while others complain that too much energy is spent on formal genocide recognition, at the expense of concrete efforts to help the victims of such campaigns. At some protests in Europe and elsewhere, Kurdish diaspora members have actually protested against the policies of the KRG itself – rather than against the Iraqi regime.⁸⁸

The recognition of the *Al-Anfal* Campaign as genocide is a particularly important priority for the KRG, as many Kurdish politicians see it as a possible vehicle towards the attainment of self-determination. The Israeli and Armenian experiences of statehood were given as examples in numerous interviews in order to explain why Kurds, in turn, will benefit from a fully sovereign state, and as a rationale for the international community to acknowledge their plight as it has done with other ethnic and national minorities in the past. The official KRG website clearly lays out the reasoning behind the government's lobbying for recognition, and

⁸⁶ In this article, the focus is predominantly on how the KRG is trying to establish policies to institutionalize diaspora-state engagement. It should be noted that, diaspora is much more heterogeneous and there are many movements who are critical of the current government due to corruption, nepotism and clientelism among other issues. Gorran Movement (Movement of Change), for instance, have considerable support in the diaspora.

⁸⁷ Interview with Gorran Representatives in Berlin.

⁸⁸ See "Kurds Demonstrate in front of the European Parliament", *Ekurd*, 28 February 2011. <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/2/state4750.htm>

the predominant message is that they wish to prevent future massacres, and do justice to the victims of previous ones.⁸⁹ The politicians acknowledge that they are likely to need the support and input of the diaspora in order to keep this issue high on the agenda of European governments. In collaboration with the KRG Representations, diaspora organizations have been lobbying their host-country governments for recognition of the genocide. Sweden, Norway and the UK are among the countries which have already recognized the *Al-Anfal* Campaign as genocide. The respective Kurdish diasporas of Germany and the Netherlands continue to lobby their own host governments for the same recognition. In Sweden, Jabar Amin and Amineh Kakabaveh – MPs of Kurdish origin – amongst others, submitted a proposal to the Swedish parliament, and were able to ensure official recognition in Sweden of the *Al-Anfal* Campaign as genocide.⁹⁰ British MPs also unanimously recognized the *Al-Anfal* Campaign as genocide following a parliamentary debate. In the run-up to this successful recognition, the KRG Representation and Kurdish diaspora organizations joined forces in order to try and present a parliamentary petition in support of recognition. Amongst those particularly united in support of this process were the Conservative MP Nadhim Zahawi – himself of Kurdish descent – Bayan Sami Abdulrahman, the KRG Representative to the UK at the time, and the members of the All-Party Parliamentary group for Kurdistan. They constantly advertised the campaign in official meetings and seminars, often joined by high-ranking state officials. In the end, the issue was discussed in the Parliament and agreed on 1st of March 2013. In the Netherlands, efforts in pursuit of genocide recognition have not yet been successful; however, the Dutch organizations of the Kurdish diaspora were able to

⁸⁹See “Why the Need for Recognition”, <http://uk.gov.krd/genocide/pages/page.aspx?lngnr=12&smap=140000&pnr=39>.

⁹⁰Interviews with Jabar Amin (Green Party) and Amineh Kakabaveh (Leftist Party) in Stockholm, November 2012.

gather enough signatures for a monument in commemoration of Halabja victims to be erected in The Hague.⁹¹

Diasporans also try to broker friendly relations between business interests in the host state and companies in the homeland. There are numerous diasporans who set up businesses specifically for mediating on behalf of companies wishing to invest in the KRI but lacking the requisite networks and local knowledge. Diaspora members help these companies to build contacts in Iraqi Kurdistan and advise them on how they may be able to set up operations there. Kurdish business associations, which also serve as intermediaries, have been established in many countries. The Kurdish-Dutch Business Association is one good example. In our interview with the president of this association, he explained that the function of the association is to help Dutch companies that want to invest in the KRI and also to improve relations between the Kurds and the Dutch. By doing that, he assures the European investors that the region is stable and its security situation is not the same as Iraq. He emphasized that he has helped dozens of Dutch companies to set up business operations in the KRI.⁹² I observed that similar initiatives seem to be in ascendance in the USA, Germany and Sweden as well.

Conclusion

This article mapped contemporary KRG-diaspora relations based on fieldwork observations and extensive fieldwork. Drawing on previous scholarly work and prior case studies, it focused on the expectations of the KRG regarding the Kurdish diaspora, and the diaspora's contributions to the post-conflict reconstruction in the KRI. It argued that the Iraqi Kurdish

⁹¹ The author personally participated in one of the meetings between the Kurdish diaspora members and the Iraqi Embassy in The Hague where they negotiated the erection of the monument.

⁹² Interview with Bakir Lashkari, Amsterdam in October 2013.

diaspora has, since the 1970s, played a significant role in representing Kurdish voices beyond the borders of Iraq, where they were significantly suppressed. The diaspora managed to create awareness about the plight of the Kurds and the atrocities they suffered under Saddam Hussein's regime. In the aftermath of 2003 a new phase of engagement between the diaspora and the homeland has begun. The formation of the KRG and the subsequent financial boom in the region fundamentally altered diaspora-homeland dynamics. The Iraqi Kurdish diaspora has been trying to adapt its mobilization patterns to accommodate the rise of the KRG as a non-state actor in the region. The opening of KRG Representation offices across the world as tools of paradiplomacy and the KRG's diplomatic agenda has brought the centre of gravity for mobilization in support of the Kurdish cause back to Erbil, and the diaspora increasingly seems to take a complementary role. Autonomous diaspora organizations remain active, and are perhaps trying to understand and come to terms with these new dynamics, but other diaspora organizations with strong political party affiliations are closely following a KRG-tailored diaspora agenda. As suggested above, the KRG is trying to build official channels to better integrate its diaspora into homeland affairs, though certainly within the KRG's own parameters.

The current political and financial crises in the region mean that diaspora engagement is vital for the future of the KRI. It seems that the KRG expects its diaspora to lobby host-country governments for military support from Western governments for its fight against the so-called ISIL and for the recognition of an independent Kurdistan, in case the long-sought referendum is delivered and inaugurates a sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan wholly independent from Iraq. What is more, both KRG Representations and Kurdish diaspora elites have recently been lobbying for enhanced military cooperation between the KRG and Western states in the ongoing struggle against the Islamic State. The diaspora's role is still of great importance to the

eventual destiny of the KRI, but the means by which it can engage in the future are likely to depend on the openness of the homeland political space as well as its gradually changing capacity and motivation.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. Dylan O'Driscoll and Umut Kuruüzüm for their valuable comments on the earlier drafts of this article. I am also grateful to Vedat Özgün for his research assistance.

Funding

This research has been funded by an ERC Project called "Diasporas and Contested Sovereignty" (2012-2014-Grant No: 284198) and Coventry University's Research Funding Scheme (2014-2016).

Bibliography

Akkaya, A. H. (2008) The Impact of Nation-Building Process in Iraqi Kurdistan on Kurdish Diaspora. Unpublished MA Thesis, Universiteit Gent, Belgium.

Berwari, A. & Ambrosio, T. (2008). The Kurdistan Referendum Movement: Political Opportunity Structures and National Identity, *Democratization*, 15(5), pp.891-908.

Brinkerhoff, J.M. (2008) Exploring the Role of Diasporas in Rebuilding Governance in Post-Conflict Societies. In: *Africa's Finances: The Contribution of Remittances*, pp. 239-262 (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing).

Budabin, A.C. (2014). Diasporas as development partners for peace? The alliance between the Darfuri diaspora and the Save Darfur Coalition, *Third World Quarterly*, 35(1), pp. 163-180.

Cheran, R. (2004). Diaspora circulation and transnationalism: Agents for change in the post-conflict zones of Sri Lanka. Policy paper submitted to the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Management, (Berlin, Germany).

Derderian, D. (2010) Democracy in Armenia and Diaspora-Armenia relations' Paper presented to the Second Annual PFA Forum on Armenia-Diaspora Relations, February 28 – March 2, (Washington D.C, USA).

Emanuelsson, A. (2005) Diaspora Global Politics, PhD Thesis, (Goteborg University, Sweden).

Emanuelsson, A. (2008) Transnational Dynamics of Return and The Potential Role of the Kurdish Diaspora in Developing the Kurdistan Region', (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, UK).

Gamlen, A. (2006) Diaspora engagement policies: What are they and what kinds of states use them? Working Paper 06-32, (Oxford, UK: COMPAS, University of Oxford).

Gamlen, A. (2008) Why engage diasporas? Working Paper 08-63. (Oxford, UK: COMPAS, University of Oxford).

Gunter, M. (2013) The Contemporary Roots of Kurdish Nationalism in Iraq, *Kufa Review*, 2(1), pp. 29-48.

Handbook for Armenians Abroad (2010) International Labour Organization, RA Ministry of Diaspora.

Hautaniemi, P., Juntunen, M, and Sato, M. (2013) Return Migration and Vulnerability: Case studies from Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan, Department of Political and Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, (University of Helsinki, Finland).

Irwani, M. (2015) Clientelism and Implementing Social Security Programmes on Post-Conflict Iraqi Kurdistan Region, (Newcastle Upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing).

King, D. (2005) Asylum Seekers / Patron Seekers: Interpreting Iraqi Kurdish Migration, *Human Organization*, 64(4), pp. 316-326.

Manaseryan, T. (2014) Diaspora – the comparative advantage for Armenia. Armenian International Policy Research Group, Working Paper No 4/14, (Armenia).

Mohamoud, A.A. (2006) African Diaspora and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Africa, (DIIS Brief, Denmark).

Mohan, G. (2008) Making Neoliberal States of Development: The Ghanian Diaspora and the Politics of Homelands, *Environment and Planning*, 26(3), pp.464-469.

Nielsen, T.M. & Riddle, L. (2009) Investing in Peace: The Motivational Dynamics of Diaspora Investment in Post-Conflict Economies.' *Journal of Business Ethics* 89 (4), pp. 435 – 448.

Okechukwu Unegbu, A. & Okanlawon, A. (2015) Direct Foreign Investment in Kurdistan Region of Middle-East: Non-oil Sector Analysis, *British Journal of Economics, Management and Trade*, 6(1), pp.38-49.

Ragazzi, F. (2014) A Comparative Analysis of Diaspora Policies, *Political Geography*, 41, pp.74-89.

Sanchez Villa, S. (2011) In-or Outsiders? The Return of Qualified Diaspora Members and Their Role in Rebuilding Post-Conflict Governance, *The BSIS Journal of International Studies*, 8, pp.1-31.

Sharma, K., Kashyap, A., Manuel, F. Montes, Ladd, P. (2011) *Realizing the Development Potential of Diasporas*, (United Nations University Press, New York).

Strand, A., Bendixsen, S., Paasche, E. and Schultz, J. (2011) Between Two Societies: Review of the Information, Return and Reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq programme, CMI Report.

Soguk, N. (2015) With/out a State, Kurds Rising: The Un/Stated Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq. *Globalizations*, 12(6), pp. 957-968.

Toivanen, M. (2014) Negotiating Home and Belonging: Young Kurds in Finland, PhD Thesis, (Turku, University of Turku, Finland).

Van Bruinessen, M. (2000) Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question. Working paper, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, (European University Institute, Florence).

Van Houte, M. & Davids, T. (2008) Development and Return Migration: from policy panacea to migrant perspective sustainability, *Third World Quarterly*, 29 (7), pp. 1411-1429.

Voller, Y. (2012) From rebellion to de facto statehood: international and transnational sources of the transformation of the Kurdish national liberation movement in Iraq into the Kurdistan regional government. PhD thesis, (The London School of Economics and Political Science).